

Word of Mouth

Spring 2012 No. 63



Gathering Threads
Motoring Memories
IOHA Conference Report



CONTENTS

1	PRESIDENT'S REPORT <i>by June Edwards</i>
3	TREASURER'S REPORT 2011-2012 <i>by Sally Stephenson</i>
5	COMPACT NEWS FLASH!!!
5	SHOW AND TELL AT THE AGM
6	MEMBER PROFILE: THE EMBROIDERERS' GUILD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
8	GATHERING THREADS <i>by Kay Lawrence</i>
11	SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE HEROES
12	NEWS FROM THE STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA <i>by Tonia Eldridge</i>
13	NORTHERN TERRITORY ARCHIVES SERVICE REPORT <i>by Matthew Stephen</i>
14	LIZZIE RUSSELL ORAL HISTORY GRANT <i>by Karen George</i>
14	MOTORING MEMORIES <i>by Pauline Cockrill</i>
18	17TH INTERNATIONAL ORAL HISTORY CONFERENCE REPORT THE CHALLENGES OF ORAL HISTORY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: DIVERSITY, INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION <i>by Christeen Schoepf</i>
20	LAST WORDS <i>by Matthew Stephen</i>

The Objectives of the OHAA: To promote the practice and methods of oral history; to educate in the use of oral history methods; to encourage discussion on all aspects of oral history; and to foster the preservation of oral history records in Australia.

Committee: June Edwards (President), Catherine Manning (Secretary/Membership Secretary), Sally Stephenson (Treasurer), Alison McDougall (WOM Editor), Catherine Murphy (Handbook Distribution), Madeleine Regan, Karen George, Tonia Eldridge (Oral History Program Coordinator, State Library of South Australia)

Membership: 1 June 2012 to 31 May 2013.

Individual \$40; Institution \$65; Household \$55; Student/Unemployed/Pensioner \$30

Editor: Alison McDougall

Oral History Association of Australia (South Australian Branch) Inc

PO Box 3113, Unley, SA 5061

ISSN 0813-1392

Contributions to *Word of Mouth* should reach the Branch by **15March 2013**

Please send contributions (if possible) by email via www.ohaa-sa.com.au or

on disc to The Editor, *Word of Mouth*, at the above address.

The views expressed in Word of Mouth are not necessarily those of the Oral History Association of Australia (South Australian Branch) Inc.

Layout & cover design by David Smids, Wildfire Design, www.wildfiredesign.com.au

Personal life memory books created for people with dementia.

Photograph by Alison McDougall.

President's Report

by June Edwards

Committee

The OHAA (SA/NT Branch) committee for 2012/13 remains the same:

June Edwards	– President
Catherine Manning	– Secretary and membership
Sally Stephenson	– Treasurer
Alison McDougall	– Newsletter editor
Karen George	– Oral history workshops
Catherine Murphy	– Handbook distribution
Madeleine Regan	– 175 th project co-ordinator
Tonia Eldridge	– State Library's oral history programme organiser

Workshops/talks/events

- As mentioned in the last issue of *Word of Mouth* two *How to do oral history* workshops were run in November 2011, our usual Adelaide workshop at the State Library and a workshop in Andamooka for the Andamooka Progress Association run by John Mannion.
- Another *How to do oral history* workshop was run in April 2012 with participants from country towns such as Coober Pedy, Murray Bridge and Goolwa plus university students, museum volunteers and members of organisations such as St John's Ambulance and Calvary Hospital palliative care program. Karen George and Peter Kolomitsev ran the sessions.

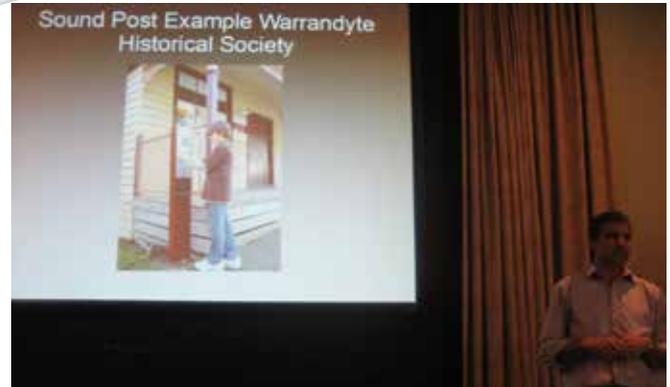
Catherine Manning ran a seminar for two of the volunteers at the Migration Museum and four members of the Organisation of Hellene and Hellene-Cypriot Women of Australia. The latter recently won a community heritage grant.

Thanks to Karen, Silver Moon, Peter, John and Catherine for running these sessions which help people understand what is required to achieve a well recorded interview. Also thanks must go to Tonia Eldridge for her support with the organisation of the workshops and to the State Library for its in-kind support.

- I gave a talk to the Seaford Public Library volunteers in May. It was a very chilly evening so it was wonderful to see a good turnout and the members showed a lot of interest and were very hospitable. Most members were 'ten pound poms' so had interesting stories to tell. In August Tonia Eldridge and I gave a talk on oral history to University of South Australia students and they

gave very positive feedback.

A really successful advanced workshop was held at the State Library of South Australia for the *About Time: South Australia's History Festival 2012* on 31 May, 'Connecting the 'history' in oral history. Spreading the word – using oral history interviews'.



Neville Clark

Neville Clark from Disk Edits, Dr Susan Anderson, Dr Karen George, David Smids (Wildfire Design), Catherine Manning and Dr Susan Marsden all gave really informative, useful and often amusing and moving talks. They included the use of oral history (in audio format and transcribed) in museums, exhibitions and written biographies. There was a good attendance and participation. Thanks for the effort put in by the speakers which made this event such a success.



Presenters: David Smids, Karen George, Sue Anderson, Catherine Manning and Susan Marsden

- On Thursday 16 August we ran an extremely interesting advanced workshop entitled 'Remembering Lives'. It featured speakers who are working in the fields of dementia, palliative care and with community groups. They shared with us a range of approaches and tools which build on current oral history practices.

Louise Finnane and Anthea Heal began the Biography Service at Calvary North Adelaide Hospital. It is a volunteer service where participants record the client's narrative during hour long visits.

One of the main aims of the biography service is to engender in patients a positive affirmation of a life lived, a sense of who they are and to achieve a healing peaceful state of being.



The biography process

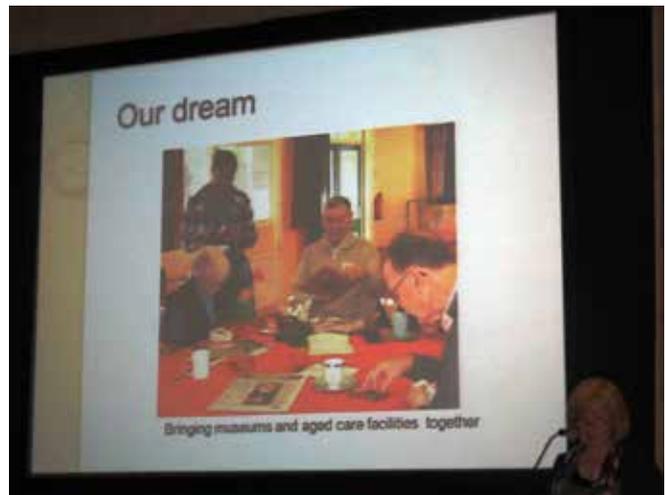
Photograph courtesy of Mary Potter Foundation

Lenore de la Perrelle is currently the Manager of the Dementia Learning and Development Unit in the ACH Group. Creating a personal life history can assist families, care staff and the person with dementia to recall important parts of their life, to identify important events, preferences and values and to create care that respects those parts of the person's history. She outlined adaptations and communication strategies that are needed to support a person with dementia to participate in creating a personal life history.



Examples of personal life history books

Pauline Cockrill and Allison Russell from History SA discussed reminiscence projects and memory, including a project they undertook at the National Motor Museum with the Morris Register of South Australia and Resthaven (see p.14), and a research collaboration with Flinders Medical Centre.



Pauline Cockrill: Bringing museums and aged care facilities together

They also provided an overview of some recent research undertaken by University College London about the importance of touch in memory recall.



Allison Russell with items from a memory box

Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant

Once again we had good submissions for The Lizzie Russell Oral History grant in 2010. We didn't receive any applications in 2011. CraftSouth won the grant this year for its project *Traditional Craft Skills Project - Creative Partnerships Oral Histories*. (see p.14)

Handbooks

Catherine Murphy has been busy sending out the Oral History Handbooks and the remaining boxes were sent to Kangaroo Island recently so we have sold about two thirds of the last print run. Well done Catherine.

Financial matters

Sally Stephenson is proving to be a very efficient treasurer and has changed our account to NAB as they do not charge fees for associations which will save the Branch over \$100 annually.

Treasurer's Report 2011-2012

In July the price of handbooks was raised to \$28 for members and \$35 for non-members. Sally Stephenson our treasurer looked at the costings and advised us that there had been no increase over the past six years to compensate for the rising postage costs and inflation. Sally is heaven sent as far as the president is concerned.

Newsletters

Alison McDougall needs to be thanked for producing two excellent editions of *Word of Mouth*. A pdf version is available for members who would prefer to receive it electronically. This year several positive emails praising the newsletter have come in so the publication is one for which the SA/NT branch can be proud.

Membership

Memberships have remained steady between 50-60 when the life members are included. Thanks to Catherine Manning for keeping this task well organised.

SA 175th Anniversary Project

No extra interviews have been added to the site but we are hoping to add more this year. Also some community groups which have submitted grants to funding bodies have added money for putting interviews onto the website. Hopefully this will mean a variety of recordings will be added this year.

2013 OHAA national conference, 21-24 September

A conference committee of OHAA (SA/NT) members – the OH branch committee plus Annmarie Reid, Peter Hackworth, Sue Anderson and Megg Kellham (from NT) – has met a few times with History SA staff – Mandy Paul, Margaret Anderson, Karen Blackwood – and Professor Alan Mayne from UniSA. The conference title now is:

She said, he said:

reading, writing and recording histories

Joint event: Biennial National Conference of the OHAA and 21st State History Conference.

UniSA is kindly sponsoring the venue and technological support. The rooms have been booked. We have worked out a list of people to contact for the plenary speakers. Mandy Paul has issued an expression of interest for the design of the publicity material, programme etc. So things are moving along in a positive fashion.

My thanks to committee members Karen George, Catherine Manning, Alison McDougall, Catherine Murphy, Madeleine Regan and Sally Stephenson without whose generous help we would not achieve the amount that we do.

This year has been a positive one for the Branch financially.

There were no major expenses such as Handbook reprinting or website development. Consequently we ended the year in the very healthy position of a cashbook balance of \$7,264, having made a profit of \$2,851.34. After major expenses last year, the bank account is now recovering.

Change to bank account

A change in Treasurer provided an opportunity to review the Branch's bank account. The Branch had been earning negligible interest whilst paying hefty fees. The Branch Committee approved my suggestion of changing to a new account for community associations that does not charge fees and earns no interest. This should save the Branch more than \$100 annually. This year we paid a net \$112.28 to the bank, compared with \$167 the previous financial year. In 2012-2013 there should be no fees at all.

Membership

Membership income was not significantly different from the previous financial year.

Oral History Handbook sales

There was a 5% increase in income from Handbook sales this year. However, the only costs associated with the Handbook this financial year were postage and packaging. We therefore earned a net income of \$4,563.26 from handbook sales (compared with a small net loss last year). The sale price of Handbooks has not changed for five years, despite increases in postage and printing costs incurred by the Branch. We have therefore decided, with the approval of the National Executive, to increase the cost of the Handbook from the start of the 2012 financial year.

Word of Mouth

Production of the Branch's excellent publication, *Word of Mouth*, is a considerable cost, being more than the income received from membership payments. In an attempt to reduce costs, the Editor (Alison McDougall) and I obtained quotes from a range of printers. However the current printer proved to be the most cost-effective. For the time being at least, the cost of producing *Word of Mouth* will continue to be offset by sales of the Handbook and by workshop income.

Workshops

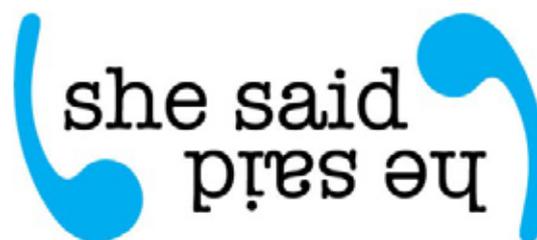
This year saw a substantial increase in workshop income, partly due to the running of an advanced workshop for the first time since April 2010, in addition to the introductory workshops. The net income was \$1,158.24, a 42% increase from the previous year.

Other

The large figures in the *Other* column require explanation. These represent largely the transfer of the proceeds from the Association's original Commonwealth Bank account (\$6,827) to the new National Australia Bank account.

Audit

The financial statements have been audited by Frances Magill Financial Strategists and deemed to present a true and fair view of the revenue collected and expenses paid of the Oral History Association of Australia (South Australian Branch).
Sally Stephenson
Treasurer
22 August, 2012



21-24 SEPTEMBER 2013, ADELAIDE
THE BIENNIAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ORAL HISTORY
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & THE 21ST STATE HISTORY CONFERENCE

Further details and enquiries:

June Edwards,
contact@ohaa-sa.com.au
(08) 8293 1314

Mandy Paul, Senior Curator, History SA,
mpaul@history.sa.gov.au
(08) 8203 9808

Karen Blackwood,
Administration Officer, History SA,
kblackwood@history.sa.gov.au
(08) 8203 9807

Financial statement compared with previous two financial years

ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA (SA BRANCH) INC

GENERAL ACCOUNT	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010
Opening Cashbook Balance	4,413.42	11,572.11	11,969.53
RECEIPTS			
Memberships	2,404.50	2,495.00	1,935.00
Handbooks	7,060.00	6,722.00	4,276.00
Newsletter	0.00	10.00	10.00
Workshops	2,470.00	1,450.00	1,770.00
Events	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bank Interest	2.67	3.94	20.07
Other	7,387.06	1,409.83	5.00
Hire Equipment	75.00	0.00	40.00
TOTAL RECEIPTS	19,399.23	12,090.77	8,056.07
PAYMENTS			
Secretarial	266.05	177.95	289.78
Word of Mouth	2,773.78	2,179.60	2,456.10
Bank Charges	114.95	171.40	135.95
Events	680.15	55.00	0.00
Workshops	1,311.76	532.26	586.00
Capitation (National)	780.00	780.00	750.00
Handbooks (Royalties, Printing, Loans)	0.00	6,237.00	2,000.00
Handbook Postage	2,496.74	624.11	550.00
Other	8,124.46	8,333.25	1,685.00
TOTAL PAYMENTS	16,547.89	19,183.57	8,452.83
Cashbook Balance	7,264.76	4,413.42	11,572.77
Profit (loss) for the year	2,851.34	-7,092.80	-396.76

Compact News Flash!!!

from Peter and Silver

Breaking news at the State Library of South Australia is the upgrade of its fleet of field recorders for the Oral History program. The new recorders are Sound Devices 702 and will replace the Fostex FR-2 for general loans. The 702 provides improvements in several areas such as recording quality and durability. But most importantly for you, the users, it is a much simpler unit to use. The 702 is almost exactly the same as the Sound Devices 722 used by the National Library of Australia. Instead of having an internal hard drive as the recording media our 702s use Compact Flash, just the same as the old Fostex FR2 recorders. We have written up a new user guide for the 702 with lots of detailed photographs to go out with each kit. All new users and existing Fostex users will need to have a one-to-one training session before their first use, but we are confident that you will find it a breeze to use. We won't be entirely retiring the Fostex recorders and will be using them for longer term projects.



Show and Tell at the AGM

by June Edwards

Presentation by Peter Kolomitsev and Silver Moon, SLSA 31 August 2012

It was obvious that Peter and Silver are very happy with the new digital recorders purchased recently by the State Library. They replace the Fostex recorders which are seven years old. These will be kept and probably issued to people for long term projects and perhaps to country libraries for projects outside the city. The SLSA is open to suggestions for the use of the old recorders.



The recorders will be housed in the same cases but it will weigh 1 ½ kilos less. They tried using the smaller black cases but it was too cramped. The Library has a trolley which borrowers can use and take away with them. Borrowers can pick up the cases by driving around to the loading bay at the rear of the library and meeting Peter/Silver. The new recorders still use flash cards. They have stayed with these as they work well and these recorders are much cheaper than those used by the National Library. The units cost about \$2,500. They are very solid and sturdier than the old ones. The knobs are separate so no more fiddling with the dual knobs. Lovely bright lights so the sound levels are easy to monitor and they are colour coded green, amber and red; one menu and very few switches. The card goes in the back which is a much better arrangement. You can pause without it starting a new file so that is good. They have written a manual with colour photos to go with it and Peter has 'curtailed the nerdiness' so it is straightforward. Peter and Silver would like feedback on the manual if people find any difficulties. At the time of writing Peter and Silver were in a square box for accommodation as the audio studios were being combined into one area and the shell and room inside were being sound proofed. The installers have been good and their work should be completed. Then the studios were being refurbished. There will be a vestibule which will ensure the inner room is protected from outside noise. All very positive. Tonia Eldridge advised that the J.D. Somerville Collection has now over 1000 projects in its collection – a great achievement!

*M*ember Profile

The Embroiderers' Guild of South Australia

This profile, kindly provided by Beryl Kerlake, combines her story with an overview of the history of Embroiderers' Guild of South Australia. The Guild joined as members of the OHAA in 2011.

I'd like to tell you about the beautiful craft of Embroidery with which I have recently become involved. Although I learned about this at my mother's knee, I thought it would be lovely to try this again.

What is embroidery? Well, it is not working with crochet hooks or knitting needles or lace bobbins! When first I went to the Embroiderers' Guild I was quite surprised to discover the diversity of beautiful stitching happening. I consulted the dictionary which says, 'stitching with a needle and thread, with various kinds of threads/fibres, on different kinds of fabrics/surfaces.' Well, that's what is happening on most days of the week and some evenings at our Guild. There can be a special interest group meeting to do any one of a huge range of stitching (about twenty actually!). There is often a fair amount of chattering happening too! Of course, it's always about the current piece of work!

Twenty different stitch groups? While not classes, someone who is willing to give handy hints will come to your aid if in trouble!

As well as special interest groups there are classes, such as Back to Basics, where students learn about construction as well as embroidery. There are sessions for juniors, and workshops where specialised study and work completed can contribute to a Certificate of Excellence Course.

Back in the early 1960s a small group of ladies discovered they all shared a passion for embroidery. They decided it would be a lovely thing to do it together, so they met in each other's homes regularly to embroider and share ideas about this beautiful craft. Word spread and more women wanted to join them. Homes became too small so they moved to hired venues.

In 1965 the group became The Embroiderers' Guild of South Australia and in 1966 members drew up a constitution with aims and objectives formally set down. The first newsletter was produced in 1965 which later became the monthly 'Review' Magazine, which keeps us up-to-date with all the happenings of the Guild.

Eventually, the group became so large that they decided to purchase a property. In 1987 when a property at 16 Hughes Street, Mile End, was FOR SALE it seemed to be just the right place and in the right location. This property comprised of a house and in the rear a warehouse for commercial purposes. The sale was made! In 1994 the property was paid off! In 1996 it was decided that as street parking was often a problem for members, the next door neighbours be approached re negotiating the purchase of their 'back yard.' That was successful.

In 2003 final payment was made on that property! There are twelve country branches. Even though many members have to travel quite long distances, they enthusiastically relate stories of their gatherings.

Exhibitions of Work are held regularly. A Suitcase Exhibition, comprising a suitcase full of lovely items from our museum, is available to take to other groups to promote the Embroiderers' Guild. A Bi-annual Exhibition runs in conjunction with the Fringe Festival and we attend Craft Fairs to display our members' work and encourage people to join our Guild.

Education is a very important aspect of the Guild; a Summer School being conducted in January with special classes – the tutors are international, national and local – and teaching of a very high skill. We sometimes have 'Come and try' demonstrations at local libraries and venues, where people are invited to try a few simple stitches, and invited to come to the Guild.

Awards are presented to members for service to the Guild, and for long time membership as well as Life Membership. Conferences are held annually in the city and country venues, and are a great opportunity for members to be motivated, to share new ideas and offer companionship.

Members are enthusiastically encouraged to enter their work in the Royal Adelaide Show. This is an excellent opportunity to promote Embroidery and our Guild.

During the year there are special 'optional extra' classes conducted for those wanting to learn something different.

Over the years the Guild has amassed a quite sizeable number of books and so a library was formed which has needed to be accommodated with each move. There are books, magazines and pamphlets covering a vast range of embroidery. It is wonderful to be able to find a reference on just the stitch or design needed.

From time to time people acquire articles which have been embroidered, either in another time or another place, and they donate them to our Guild. We now have an Accredited Museum with many beautiful pieces, in excess of 2000. The first sampler donated was made in 1823 and worked by the great grandmother of the donor. The dedicated 'museum' team display collections throughout the buildings. At present there is a collection of work by a noted embroiderer, Olive Braun. She was a prolific embroiderer and did most of her stitching in 1920s and 30s. She liked to enter her work in the local shows, and was mostly successful in gaining first prize! There were two occasions when a lesser prize was awarded, and that was because the articles had been entered in the wrong classification! Her work will be on display in the 'house' until mid-December, 2012.

When members learned of the Oral History Association they realised what a wonderful way it could be to gain word-of-mouth stories of Guild members. We are in the process of interviewing some of our members to record their memories of the foundation and early days of our Guild.

Some members have worked at embroidery since early childhood; some are quite new to this delightful art. A visit to the members' library is bound to 'get the creative juices flowing', and one can often be challenged to try something new! Perhaps you have a yearning to join our Guild?



Pictured is a tiny sample of a Carrickmacross Lace Wedding Veil stitched at a class by Glenda Lawrie when she first joined our Guild. Glenda completed the veil which her daughter wore for her wedding. She has recently given it to our museum. What a treasure!

Photograph courtesy of Glenda Lawrie

For more information visit:

<http://www.embGuildsa.org.au/index.html>

Oral History Workshop, 1 November 2012

Workshop participants learning to use the new recorders, Sound Devices 702, at the State Library of South Australia.



Gathering Threads

by Kay Lawrence

I am currently working with the National Library of Australia on an oral history project focused on recording whole of life interviews with a group of around 25 key women who stitched the Parliament House Embroidery (PHE), a major public artwork created for Parliament House in Canberra in 1988. The interviews explore their participation in the project and the meaning of embroidery in their lives.

As the designer of the embroidery I worked for four years between 1984 and 1988 with embroidery coordinator, Anne Richards, and 498 women from Embroiderers' Guilds across Australia to supervise the translation of my design into embroidery. It was a huge project in every way; the size of the embroidery, a long panel sixteen metres by 65 cm stitched in eight separate sections; the hundreds of people involved; the geographical spread across the eight states and territories of Australia, and not least, the huge expectations underpinning the project.

For Dorothy Hyslop from the ACT who initiated the project, this was to be an internationally significant commemorative embroidery in the tradition of the Bayeux Tapestry (really an embroidery) that would raise the status of embroidery in Australia as it celebrated, perhaps unquestioningly, the idea of the nation.

For Mitchell, Guirgola and Thorpe, the architects of Parliament House, who inherited the project (Dorothy Hyslop had astutely gained 'in principal' approval of the project from both Houses of

Parliament before the architects were appointed) it was an opportunity to turn what many saw as a liability into a major artwork that told the human story of Australia's settlement. Art critic David Dolan recalled that, at the time, 'hearts sank everywhere when it became known that the Parliament had accepted an offer of a giant embroidery by the embroiderers' guilds', yet the architects saw this as an opportunity to commission an artwork that symbolised democracy by engaging ordinary people from across Australia in its creation.

For me, when I won a national competition to design the embroidery, it was an opportunity to work on an unprecedented scale, conceptually and physically, and especially in being able to draw upon the skills of hundreds of embroiderers to create the work. It was also a terrifying responsibility. Was the design conceptually strong enough to warrant the input of so many people? Was it possible to create a coherent art work in eight separate locations? How could we ensure success when so many volunteer embroiderers were involved?

Yet, against the odds, the Parliament House Embroidery did succeed and is now regarded as one of the most successful works in the building. But it's only in hindsight, 30 years after the project began that I began to think about *why* it succeeded and wonder what their participation meant to the women involved.

I kept a diary of my involvement in PHE that not only recorded day to day events, but also my feelings and anxieties about the project as it progressed (or not) week after week, when success was far from a foregone conclusion. But what were the embroiderers thinking as they translated the design into stitch? I'm sure there were many conversations at the embroidery frame and around the dinner table and wakeful moments at 4am, but almost none of this has been documented. It's this aspect of the creation of the work that's missing in the small booklet documenting the work, 'A work of

many hands', published in 1988, and in the extensive material that has been lodged in the National Library and National Museum. There are only a few personal reflections from the embroiderers themselves in the archives, written as the project happened. The ones that are there are tantalising.

Wanda MacPherson, coordinator of the Victorian section asked some of the embroiderers who stitched the work to write about their experience in short articles published in the Victorian Guild's newsletter. Each of the six entries details the embroiderer's feelings of excitement and trepidation about beginning to stitch, how they went about it and their sense of accomplishment on completing their section. Interestingly many women personalised their relationship with the image they were embroidering. One embroiderer describes stitching the miner working in the Broken Hill mine as 'My affair with Henry' and describes her affair thus; 'I lay awake at night thinking of him. I was preoccupied all day. The shirts remained unironed, dust gathered on the furniture while I dreamed, schemed and toiled.'¹ Characterising her passion for embroidery as an illicit love affair enabled her to articulate the intensity of her engagement in the project, while hinting at the power of embroidery to subvert her role as wife and mother.

It was this passion and commitment that sparked my desire to interview key women involved in the project. In investigating what engagement in the PHE meant to them many more questions have arisen? What were their expectations at the beginning of the project? How did individual embroiderers develop such extraordinary skills in a craft practice that is rarely taught in formal educational institutions? How did they negotiate the professional expectations of producing an artwork for a significant public space? What did it mean to be involved in such a project? And the bigger question of what embroidery has meant to them as a practice that often acts as a signifier of relationships with family and community?

I am now half way through the project having now completed interviews with embroiderers from the ACT, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. To begin to answer these questions, I'll discuss my interview with Elsie Moss from South Australia. Her story shares common threads with the experiences of the other embroiderers, yet is unique.

Elsie Moss

Elsie was born in Leeds, UK, in 1923 to a poor Irish/English family, the eldest girl of six children. Poverty forced her to leave school to begin work at fourteen despite winning a scholarship to attend

college. Unlike most of the women I've interviewed who were taught embroidery by their mothers or grandmothers, Elsie taught herself embroidery from magazines as a young woman when she was working and had time and money for herself. She had of course learnt to sew as a child; for girls in working class families plain sewing was a necessity, but embroidery was a leisure pursuit for the well off.

The Embroiderers' Guild in England was a bit more elitist if you like to call it that... most of the working class hadn't time to embroider... ladies of leisure had time to really do it.

Elsie, who started work as a junior cashier, educated herself on the job and by attending night school. She always expected to work, but after her marriage circumstances made this impossible. She went to Ghana with her husband where he worked as an engineer in a colonial outpost where women were not expected to work and where moreover, jobs for women were not available. Later, when they migrated to Adelaide in the 1960s, she found it difficult to get paid work. It was these circumstances that gave her the time to develop her skills and passion for embroidery. It was through the Embroiderers' Guild of South Australia that she *learnt different ways of doing things* through teaching and assessing in the Guild's four-year certificate course.

The Guild also gave her the opportunity to work as a volunteer on large scale commissions so that when she got involved in the PHE as one of the section coordinators, she was highly skilled and experienced in working on large collaborative projects. She took the challenges of working on such a large and complex project in her stride, noting that,

If you can get enough people together to do a job it will get done, and especially if they're all embroiderers, they all have the one aim. They like to see something produced which they can admire.

Elsie Moss stitching the bushfire section of the PHE



Unlike some of the other Guilds who only allowed the most experienced embroiderers to put a stitch in their section of the embroidery, the South Australian Guild was very inclusive, encouraging all members, including young embroiderers, to participate. Elsie explained,

It was decided everybody in the Guild should be given an opportunity if they wanted and the juniors usually met once a month on a Saturday so on this particular Saturday, they were all lined up and came and they did two or three stitches and of course their names were included in the list of participants ... I think it was probably the first thing they'd done as a combined effort on a large piece of work, which I think even for the older embroiderers, that was something they'd never done before.

When considering what she got from her involvement in the PHE, Elsie spoke of the sense of satisfaction in being involved in *something that was be going to be seen for donkey's years*, but like Dorothy Hyslop, she was also interested in the wider impact of the project, noting,

Basically I think it put the embroiderers' guilds on the map ... and that brought in quite a lot of new members ... now they've gone past the scale of doilies and table mats, they've realised you can do far more with embroidery.

Like all the women I've interviewed, Elsie's embroidery is just one aspect of a wider textiles practice that is central to her life. In Elsie's case sewing textiles is intimately bound up with volunteer work. When she was not able to get paid work on her arrival in Australia, Elsie began to work for her community. She managed the finances of her parish church as a volunteer until she was 80, and she still sews garments for St Vincent de Paul at 89.



Elsie holding up a dress in her workroom

Her workroom is structured like an assembly line; she cuts the cloth for garments one day and sews them up the next, efficiently producing a set number of garments each week. When asked why she volunteers, she speaks of the satisfaction of seeing things completed and continues,

Well, when we were young we had very little and quite often you could see my mother really worried because she hadn't the money to really feed us properly, and clothing, that was difficult. So that was one reason why I started with St Vincent De Paul because I knew I could sew, and it always stuck in my mind that if I could help people, provide something that we weren't provided with when we were little and if I had time to do it, why not? ... Instead of sitting around doing nothing I prefer to actually do something and produce something that can be useful one way and another ... to have time and not use it usefully is just a waste of time.

Elsie maintains the values of thrift, industriousness and making-do that shaped her childhood. But for her, it's hand-embroidery rather than machine-embroidery that produces the pleasure.

You're so much in control of what you're doing and that makes a big difference. To me the sewing machine is basically for more mundane, everyday sort of work. That doesn't produce the pleasure of seeing what you can do yourself.

Her pleasure and wicked sense of humour is evident in the small embroidery she recently stitched, a literal representation of the biblical text 'And the Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden.'



Elsie's 'And the Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden'

Like so many of the women I've interviewed she also uses her embroidery skills to record significant moments of family history, embroidering the regimental banner of the now disbanded Connaught Rangers, the Irish regiment that her father fought for during the First World War.



Elsie with McDonnell tartan and lion and banner of Connaught Rangers

While the interviews I've conducted so far record many common experiences in the lives of the women who stitched the Parliament House Embroidery, it's the particular way embroidery and textiles are threaded into each life that makes this project so fascinating.

Elsie Moss interviewed by Kay Lawrence, 20/4/2010 & 25/4/2010 TRC 6138/5, National Library of Australia

Parliament House Embroidery 1985-1988 by KAY LAWRENCE (1947)
Gifts Collection, Courtesy of Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra, A.C.T.
Photograph by John Gollings (1944 -)

Photographs of Elsie Moss courtesy of Kay Lawrence.

Professor Kay Lawrence is a visual artist and writer working in textiles and former Head of the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia. Her recent work uses textile processes to explore ideas of community and loss, resulting in the community based project, Your heart's desire, that uses simple textiles processes to engage people in thinking about the rituals and meanings of everyday life. Her collaboration with the women who stitched the Parliament House Embroidery in the mid 1980s activated her interest in the role of textile practice in the lives of women, and led her to develop the Parliament House Embroiderers Oral History project which she is currently undertaking with the National Library of Australia.

(Endnotes)

1 Miller M, 'My affair with Henry', The Embroiderers Guild, Victoria News-sheet, No 270, July 1987.

South Australian Heritage Heroes

In May this year the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, the Hon. Paul Caica, presented Heritage Heroes awards recognising the efforts of groups and individuals who have made a significant contribution to recognising, celebrating and conserving the State's heritage.

The Minister's Award for an individual went to historian Susan Marsden, who has spent 35 years working to recognise and preserve South Australia's heritage. Susan is a Life Member of the OHAA.

A Special Minister's Award for an individual was presented posthumously to the late Maggie Ragless, a strong supporter of heritage within the City of Mitcham. Maggie was a long term member of the OHAA until her untimely death in March this year.

Congratulations to Susan, and this was also a fitting recognition of Maggie's work.

NEWS FROM THE STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

by Tonia Eldridge

Q) What do a Professor of Photonics, a lesbian poet and a communist shearer have in common (other than sounding like characters in a dodgy joke)?

A) Each has contributed their voice to the J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection during the past year.

If you conduct an archival number search of the SLSA catalogue (<http://www.catalog.slsa.sa.gov.au/>) using OH 987, OH 909/6 or OH 963, you can find out more about the University of Adelaide's Tanya Monro, Miriel ('Moo') Lenore and Jim Doyle. If you ask a Librarian to complete a manual slip, you can retrieve the disks and listen to Peter Donovan's three hour, twenty-one minute interview with Professor of Photonics, Tanya Monro. For Miriel Lenore and Jimmy Doyle you might need to bring a packed lunch (just kidding – everyone knows eating is verboten in the A/V room), since Moo's spans nine CDs and Jim's a whopping nineteen!

These diverse characters are clearly not the only additions to the J.D. Somerville Collection since July 2011. For the past couple of years, the Collection has grown by more than 200 hours annually. Thanks to a donation of tapes spanning 55 hours of recording, the growth for the 2011/12 year exceeds 300 hours.

Other notable additions since the previous edition of *Word of Mouth* include:

OH 730/18-28: City Memory – City of Adelaide Oral History (extension) Project – Madeleine Regan
The Adelaide City Council's oral history programme spans more than twenty years and comprises 110 recorded interviews. The Collection is held in the City Council Archives and consists of the original tape recordings and printed transcripts. The Council sent the first seventeen interviews of their City Memory project to the State Library in 2005 to be digitised, and the State Library included copies of these in OH 730. The intention was for the Council to digitise the remaining interviews in the collection, and some examples of these can be found at <http://www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/council/city-archive/oral-history/>. Council decided, last year, to add to the existing collection, and in September 2011

Madeleine Regan commenced interviews with a further ten individuals. Diversity was, again, a feature of the interviewees, and ultimately included a centenarian resident, former Councillors and Council employees, businessmen and former Lord Mayors. As with the previous SLSA/City of Adelaide Collaboration, a copy of each interview is held by both institutions and will be accompanied by a full transcript of each when completed.

OH 997: Alf Gard – Allison Murchie

Born Alfred Brentall Gard, 5 April 1922 at Dulwich, to parents who met at Elder Hall, sang duets and toured England, Alf's early focus was on a potential career as a tennis player. This was interrupted by World War Two, when he (and co-workers from the ABC) enlisted in the RAAF. After training in Victor Harbor and Queensland, he was sent to England, then North Africa, where he ferried planes from Tunis to Italy and back to Algiers. He went to Cairo to learn how to fly Hellcats, the navy version of the Wirraway, and was there when he heard of the end of the War. He eventually got a boat at Aden, contracted malaria and pleurisy, and came home on the Stirling Castle. A plan to continue in the Air Force changed when he met his future wife, Jacqueline, at the Hindmarsh Hotel. She worked as a secretary in the ABC drama unit, and they were married on 10 April 1947 at St John's Halifax Street. Their son Tim was born in 1949 and daughter Deb in 1953. After the War, the ABC created a new position in each state of Sporting Assistant Grade 1, so Alf did the sporting highlights three nights a week plus Saturday, and his first outside broadcast was for football with Vic Richardson at Norwood Oval. In 1952 he was the deputy race caller at ABC, calling the trotting first and continuing as a race caller until 1976. The ABC sent him to Melbourne for nine weeks for the 1956 Olympics where he was originally supposed to call the boxing, but instead called the cycling. He ultimately called twenty sports while working for the ABC including football, tennis, swimming, racing, golf, boxing, hockey, lacrosse, rugby and golf.

OH 1004: Graeme Koehne – Rob Linn, Eminent Australians Oral History Programme
Graeme Koehne was born in Adelaide in 1956, completing his undergraduate and post-graduate studies at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide, studying composition with Richard Meale. In 1984 he was awarded the Harkness Fellowship to work at the School of Music, Yale University. Here he studied with Louis Andriessen and Jacob Druckman, and for two years of the fellowship he also took private lessons with Virgil Thomson in New York. Koehne returned to

Australia in 1986 and was appointed Lecturer in Composition at the Elder Conservatorium of Music. He gained national attention at the 1992 Festival of Arts when he was awarded the Young Composers Prize for his orchestral work *Rainforest*. Around this time Graeme commenced his long collaboration with the choreographer Graeme Murphy, which included a children's ballet based on Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* and the full-length work *Nearly Beloved*. He is renowned particularly as a composer for orchestra – his orchestral works *Rainforest*, *Unchained Melody*, *Powerhouse* and *Elevator Music* have been widely performed by orchestras around the world, as have his concertos *Inflight Entertainment* and *High Art*. Graeme Koehne is Head of Composition at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, and was awarded a Doctorate of Music from the University in 2002. He was Chair of the Australia Council Music Board and a member of the Australia Council from 2002 to 2009. In recognition of his contribution to Australian music, Koehne was awarded the Australian Government's Centenary Medal in 2001 and the Sir Bernard Hinze Award from the University of Melbourne in 2004.

OH 1005: Parafield Airport Oral History Project – Nigel Daw

Nigel Daw is an aviation historian and co-author of *An iconic airline: the story of Airlines of South Australia*, the people the places and the planes. After hearing of the Library's role as a repository for unpublished South Australian oral recordings at an Introductory Oral History Workshop, he queried whether we would be interested in the more than 50 hours of recordings he made, in the early to mid 1990s, about Parafield Airport. After listening to a sample, to gauge technical/interviewing quality, we were delighted to take delivery of the full complement of recordings. Parafield was South Australia's first airport, home to early carriers such as Guinea Airways and Airlines of South Australia, and a base for the Royal Aero Club of South Australia. Mr Daw interviewed 30 different people with long-standing associations with the Airport: through one of the airlines, the Club, as pilots or employees. Aviation history was not well-represented in the J.D. Somerville Collection, so the donation has well and truly filled a niche. The recordings are not yet available, as the audio engineers are ploughing through the time consuming digitisation process, but they will be a wonderful resource for anybody with an interest in stories about South Australia's early airlines and aviation.

Northern Territory Archives Service Report

by Matthew Stephen

The Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) Oral History Advisory Committee held its first meeting in July. The committee will provide advice to NTAS on the policy and direction of the oral history unit. The first meeting considered the collections policy, transcripts and the selection of interview candidates. There was also considerable discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the NTAS oral history collection and where there might be 'gaps'. This is an interesting question when you consider the cultural diversity of the NT and how an oral history collection might be 'representative'. The committee will meet twice a year.

The Defence of Darwin/Department of Veterans Affairs Bombing of Darwin oral history project was concluded in July. The project resulted in the collection of thirteen oral history interviews of between one and three hours with veterans and civilians who experienced the bombing of Darwin during World War Two. Each interview has also formed the basis of a 'Digital Story' that will be exhibited in the Defence of Darwin Experience located at the East Point Military Museum, Darwin. I would encourage any visitors to take the time to include the Defence of Darwin Experience into their itinerary. The NTAS oral history collection is featured heavily throughout the exhibitions. (see Last Words p.20)

The newly elected Country Liberal Government is just commencing its four year term. As only the second change of government in the Northern Territory's history of self government since 1978 it will be an interesting time in the NT. As the cabinet is only now being formed there are no indications as to the new government's approach to the areas of history or heritage. As they say, 'We live in interesting times.'

[See also these websites for insights into Northern Territory families – Ed]
<http://www.territoryfamilies.nt.gov.au/home>
<http://www.territoryfamilies.nt.gov.au/touring-exhibition>

Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant

The successful applicant for the 2012 Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant was Craftsouth for a project entitled 'Traditional Craft Skills Project – Creative Partnerships Oral Histories.'

This project will record interviews with five traditional craftspeople and five artists who, in creative partnership, are developing an exhibition of new works of art. The whole of life interviews will focus on the practitioners' history of craft making and the processes they undertake in their work. They will be recorded with craftspeople from diverse cultural backgrounds including Iran, Nigeria, Eritrea and Columbia and South Australian artists. In recording the stories and skills, the project will allow for intergenerational and communal handing down of skills. The interviews will be published on a website which will highlight the significance of these cultural practices in the multicultural community of South Australia. The website will include sound excerpts from the recordings.

Craftsouth's project proposal was well planned and presented. It is to be completed by a professional team who have sought advice and training from the State Library of South Australia. The project has an innovative multidisciplinary approach and a valuable aim to preserve craft skills and assist in handing them down to following generations. The project has the potential to connect across generations and cultures. Publication of sound on a website will allow community access to the results of the project. There is also a plan to seek sponsorship from Apple so that ipods can be used by visitors to the resulting exhibition.

Congratulations on a great project.

Karen George
on behalf of the OHAA (SA/NT Branch)

Motoring Memories

by Pauline Cockrill,

Community History Officer, History SA

The Motoring Memories Oral History Project, undertaken during 2010, was a joint venture between the National Motor Museum, the Morris Register of South Australia and the Resthaven Aged Care Facility in Malvern. Pauline Cockrill, Community History Officer with History SA and then also a curator at the National Motor Museum, tells the story of how the project came about, what was involved and the outcomes for all parties concerned.

In March 2010, my colleague Allison Russell, at that time Senior Community History Officer and former Senior Curator at the National Motor Museum, was approached by a member of the Morris Register of South Australia with an idea to ponder. Originally called the Morris 8/40 Club and formed in 1973, the Morris Register is the oldest Morris car club in Australia. It promotes interest in, enthusiasm and restoration for all Nuffield vehicles including Morris, MG, Riley and Wolseley.

The idea was this. The Morris 8/40 was coming up to its 75th birthday which they wanted to recognise in some way. For some time members of the club had been visiting a number of Resthaven Aged Care Facilities in the Adelaide suburbs in order to take some of the more agile residents 'for a short spin' around the block in their vintage cars. They were keen to develop this further, to perhaps interview some of the residents as well as their members about their motoring memories and work them into a publication for this classic little car's special anniversary.



Members of the Morris Register outside their club rooms in Devon Park with Gill Schultz, Resthaven Lifestyle coordinator, and Allison Russell and Pauline Cockrill of History SA.

I should at this stage explain the significance of the Morris 8/40. As I've already said, it reached a milestone birthday in 2010. The Morris 8 was first launched at the London Motor Show in 1935. Known in Australia as the Morris 8/40, it was a relatively cheap but reliable little car originally costing £118 (that's about £7000 in today's prices or nearly \$AUD11,000) although an extra £2 10s would buy you bumpers and trafficators. It was better equipped than its rival, the long-established Austin 7, while the innovative addition of an electric windscreen wiper meant it also had one over the Ford, its other major competitor. The car's popularity allowed Morris Motors to regain its position as Britain's largest car manufacturer while the widely known, much-loved Morris Minor was to be its successor.

The Morris 8 came in four options: the two or four-seater Open Tourer; or two-door or four-door Saloon. Series I was first introduced in 1935 followed by Series II in 1937-8. The latter was slightly modified. For example, it came with what was known as 'Easiclean' disc wheels, replacing the wire spoked ones of the earlier version. Then there was a third type produced known as the E Series in 1938-1948. You can spot the later design by what was known as the curved 'waterfall' dummy grille on the radiator. There was also a van version of the Series E called the Series Z and produced from 1940-1954 with a special Coupé Utility being manufactured in Australia using locally-made bodywork and imported chassis and engines.

And that's as much as I can say about the Morris 8/40. Of course I could state that ... *it was powered by a Morris UB series 918cc four-cylinder side-valve engine with three bearing crankshaft and single SU carburettor with maximum power of 23.5bhp (17.5kW)*... but I have no idea what all that means.

The important thing as far as this project was concerned was not the car's technical specs but its ability to evoke fond memories. It was a universally popular car. It was often people's first car both in the 1930s, and still reliable in the 1950s as a second hand car. You can mention the Morris 8 amongst people of a certain age and their comment will invariably be, *oh, I had one of those, or my dad had one of those, or that was our first family car, etc.*

As we discussed the idea further with the Morris Register we saw a project evolving that would create a level of rich community engagement which would have several positive outcomes for all parties concerned including an opportunity for some innovative reminiscence therapy and a new source of oral histories.

Allison and I share a similar interest in the ongoing research into the benefits to health and wellbeing by the use of museum objects with hospital-bound patients or residents in aged care facilities. There has been much work done on this, for example, at University College London. The concept of community museums creating themed 'memory boxes' using artefacts, photographs, and related ephemera as well as audio, video and even relevant 'smells' has become almost main stream in UK museum and library services. The boxes are loaned out either free or for a small charge to aged care facilities and other community groups to engage

in 'reminiscence therapy', defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as, 'the use of life histories – written, oral, or both – to improve psychological well-being'. This is a concept that is developing amongst museums in Australia, mainly in NSW and Victoria but is something that we would like to introduce in South Australia.

We could see that cars are like memory boxes in themselves. For example, they can take you back to your childhood and young adulthood. What was the car your dad drove? Remembering bagging the best seat, where the family dog sat, experiences of travel sickness, picnics, family holidays, the drive-in, learning to drive, recalling the smells such as leather, petrol or oil. And touch – the feel of leather or the sun on your face. Cars can relate to many milestone events. They can trigger memories of getting married (what was your wedding car?) or a honeymoon motoring adventure, bringing baby back home from the hospital, buying your first family car – even your first 'naughty'! Then there is all the paraphernalia that goes with driving – maps, driving gloves, tools, petrol cans, picnic baskets, travel rugs ...

Enthused by the possibilities that such a project might deliver, we next made contact with then Resthaven Malvern's Lifestyle Coordinator, Gill Schulz, and further discussions revealed that Resthaven, an aged care community service of the Uniting Church in Australia, were also celebrating their 75th birthday in 2010. This was a happy synergy and directed us to create a combined celebratory event.

The project evolved thus. We would deliver professional oral history training to members of the Morris Register. They would do some practice runs with their members as well as some serious interviews and Gill would do some motoring memories reminiscence sessions with her residents to get people talking and to ascertain who might be good to interview. There would be a Grand Day Out for some of the residents with the cars in September; followed by some oral history interviews at the home at a later date. At the same time the National Motor Museum would create a small display to coincide with the Open day scheduled in October at Malvern to celebrate Resthaven's 75th anniversary. The oral history interviews would be sent to the State Library of South Australia (SLSA) for burning to disc and stored there.

There were of course some practical issues regarding OH&S, copyright and privacy to sort out and we held meetings with Resthaven's Public Relations staff to ensure all potential problems were resolved

in advance. One of our main concerns was that some motoring memories may not be happy ones. Just as reminiscence therapy can be used to unlock happy memories to induce a sense of wellbeing in a person, it can also unleash bad memories and evoke distress. We worked out strategies for the day but were also mindful that the project was to some extent open ended. We really did not know in detail what the immediate tangible outcome might be. We couldn't guarantee that suitable candidates for oral histories might emerge.

In preparation for the Grand Day Out, Gill began a series of reminiscence sessions with the residents. The National Motor Museum and the Morris Register's archives provided a source of printed and pictorial material – car manuals, sales brochures, newspaper/journal advertisements and articles, while photographs were downloaded from www.oldclassiccar.co.uk Simultaneously, Allison and I organised some training workshops for the would-be oral historians at the Morris Register's club rooms, given by Catherine Manning, the Migration Museum's Senior Curator and also secretary of the South Australian branch of the Oral History Association of Australia. Use of the OHAA's high quality digital recorder, archival standards, interviewing tips and copyright protocol were covered.

Running up to the Grand Day Out, the Morris Register ran practice sessions with some of their members in their club rooms. Personal histories ranged from memories of the first Bay to Birdwood Run and working for Adelaide's oldest motor firm Motors Ltd in Flinders Street, which had opened in 1911.

Finally the Great Day Out arrived. Five of the Morris men (as they affectionately became known) drove up to the Resthaven home in Malvern in their five Morris cars. There were Richard and Lawrie in their 1936 Series I two door Tourers, Brian with his 1937 Series I four-door Saloon and Barry with his 1939 Series E Tourer as well as Ron in his rogue MG Magnette Saloon from 1955.



Morris Register taking out Resthaven residents 'for a spin' around the block.

It was the most beautiful sunny day in a week that had been very rainy and dull. Waxed and gleaming the vintage cars attracted attention immediately. Soon the car park was milling with both residents and staff alike. In between the excited chatter, there was much opening and closing of doors, looking under bonnets, and inspecting dashboards of instruments. Then one after another each car took their turn around the block before meeting up again in the dining room for afternoon tea.

There was anecdotal evidence that there were many immediate positive outcomes from the day. For example, the arrival of the vehicles had coaxed several of the male residents who rarely left their rooms down into the car park encouraging lively discussions and unprecedented social interaction as well as many beaming smiles that lasted a lot longer than that afternoon.

We were also delighted that another outcome was the fact we were able to single out a number of people who had interesting stories to tell. We arranged to return the following week and set up a small room in which to conduct formal oral histories using the OHAA recording equipment.

In the end there were three interviewees in total – Joan, Margaret and Lindsay. Their interviews were given to the SLSA as a group known as the Motoring Memories Oral History Project, call number OH 949.



Morris Register members interviewing Margaret Shearer at Resthaven. It was discovered that she was a member of the Shearer family of Mannum. David Shearer made Australia's first car (now on display at the National Motor Museum).

The project later culminated in an Open Day at Resthaven Malvern to officially celebrate Resthaven's 75th birthday. Barry took his little red car for the occasion and we (the museum) put together two small showcases in the foyer with captions entitled *Do you remember?* We used groups of objects typical of the 1950s era relating to motoring – some picnic things and a tool box. The latter had been used on a 1949 Hillman Minx which had been driven from Adelaide to Perth sixteen times when the driver was visiting his brother.



Using oral history to write engaging text for the 'Do you remember?' display at Resthaven Malvern.

At the end of the project we could see that there were some major outcomes for each organisation involved. For Resthaven, residents certainly benefitted from the therapeutic reminiscence work. It was good to watch members of the Morris Register gain confidence in their new found skills as oral historians which they have further developed, having successfully applied for a South Australian History Fund grant to buy their own professional digital recorder and become members of the OHHA. For the museum it has been an opportunity to collect general motoring stories, and even donations of new items and photographs as a result of the display in the foyer. For all three groups it has meant the creation of useful networks for potential innovative collaborations in the future.

Photographs courtesy of History SA

17th International Oral History Conference Report The Challenges of Oral History in the 21st Century: diversity, inequality and identity construction.

By Christeen Schoepf

Buenos Aires, Argentina, is an expansive city of three million people at its heart and up to fifteen million in the surrounding suburbs. It is loud, fast and extremely busy. It is old and yet new, rambling and rundown, but spreading its wings and rebuilding. Magnificent churches abound, and changing dictatorships and regimes have left their relics. There are few quiet spaces to be found even in the wee small hours. It is culturally vibrant and protestors regularly pound their drums on the march to the square that fronts the country's governmental building. Buenos Aires has a history of colonial invasion, indigenous loss, multiculturalism and radical governments. It was the home and is the resting place of Eva Peron, and most importantly, it has a story to tell that is now being actively collected, analysed and interpreted by local chapters of the many South American Oral History Associations.

Held at the 'Centre of Cultural Cooperation' and several smaller venues in Buenos Aires, from 3-7 September 2012, the 17th International Oral History Conference, *Challenges of Oral History in the 21st Century: diversity, inequality and identity construction*, was both challenging and hectic. Unfortunately, few Australians and New Zealanders attended and distance and visa requirements prohibited many other oral historians from Europe and Africa from travelling to the conference.



Sue Bruley (UK) and Christeen Schoepf

Language also proved to be an issue with only the plenary sessions being translated from Spanish into English. However, communication between Spanish and English speaking presenters was overcome in some instances with *ad hoc* translation graciously

provided by multi-lingual members of the audience and last minute PowerPoint presentation changes using 'Google Translate'. These problems aside, the conference presented a diversity of oral history projects and current theoretical issues that reflected new directions in thinking and a range of ventures into previously unrecorded and documented oral narratives. Technology proved problematic in some venues where hardware compatibility and new versus old versions of software and operating systems created challenges for presenters who were reliant upon the technologies for the success of their papers. Due to these issues, a great deal of the oral and visual components of many papers was abandoned.

I was fortunate to have been able to attend and present a paper at this conference and was funded by several very competitive grants to this end. In the first instance, my travel and accommodation were reimbursed as the recipient of the *Keith and Dorothy McKay Scholarship*, through the University of New England, and secondly, I was awarded a scholarship through the International Oral History Association to cover conference fees, some travel, and the attendance at the Master Classes. In addition, I would like to also mention that earlier grants from the OHAA (SA/NT), *Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant Scheme*, and the Historical Society of South Australia contributed funds to indeed enable my research that was presented at the conference.

Master classes were held on Monday 3 September and covered oral history collection techniques and best practice methodologies in fields such as trauma and violence; ecology and environment; indigenous peoples; and research methods such as collecting and interpreting qualitative data. Robert Perks and Mary Stewart from the British Library (BL) presented a class on archiving oral histories, with the principles being equally applicable to large institutions such as the BL down to the smallest local history collection, library or museum. Rob Perks took the class through the process of accessioning and cataloguing oral history projects to be archived in the BL, while Mary informed the group of the latest ethical problems and solutions and the legalities of access to oral histories including copyright, anonymity, retrospective access to recordings and the handling of metadata within the archives. Since

the conference, Mary and Rob have kindly sent some further literature regarding these points which I am happy to share with anyone who wishes to have a copy. Contact me at christeen.schoepf@gmail.com for further information.



Rob Perks, British Library

Many of the English speaking participants supported each other by attending sessions in which each was embedded within the Spanish presentations. Participants from Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Germany and the United States presented some very interesting papers on issues ranging from feminist groups and protests; object biographies of hospital operating theatre spaces; volunteer workers and businesses of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill; football posters; unionism, digital history, and living with disabilities. Michelle Rayner, ABC Radio presenter and Executive Producer of 'Hindsight', presented her experiences creating narratives for radio where she personally considered the use of the audio documentary as a powerful tool for delving into the past, and into memories, both individual and collective. Ex-patriot journalist and documentary maker Fiona McDougall, now a resident of California, told of her experience making the documentary 'Living between sound and silence', and the challenges that presented themselves to the interviewees and families, the production team, and Fiona as interviewer and producer of the film. The fifteen minute documentary explores the lives of two teenage girls, one the hearing child of deaf parents, the other a deaf child of hearing parents and the two worlds of the 'other' that each move between within their family, school and social lives. The movie can be watched at

<http://tinyurl.com/sound-and-silence>

*Kirsty Cully (NZ), Christeen Schoepf,
Fiona McDougall (USA) and Sue Berman (NZ)*

Helen Klaebe from the Queensland University of Technology (and past South Australian), revealed the emptiness felt by communities in the wake of natural disasters such as cyclones, floods and fires, when in the aftermath of such events comes the realisation that everything tangible that told of the past was now gone. Along with others from QUT and the Queensland Oral History Association, Helen told how digital story-telling is giving such communities a new resource with which to rebuild the history and narrative of a locality. Workshops provided community members with the skills to record the oral histories and memories from how to use the equipment to ethics and storage of the recordings.

My own paper considered how oral history and the notion object biography not only supplement each other as methodologies but can also stimulate the production of wider and more informed questions. Examples presented included the Mayoral Chair of Port Pirie which was a research project discussing the life cycle and object biography of the chair from its birth as the barque Saturn, built in Stralsund, Germany in the late nineteenth century and its demise when it burned in the harbour at Port Pirie; then reincarnation as the Mayoral Chair built by German migrant Theodore Kneese and the chair's new life within the council chambers. Other examples were discussed from my current research project investigating the story of the Cheer-Up Society of South Australia which is also using object biography and oral history as its methodology.

The IOHA meeting elected new members for the next two year period and no decision was made regarding the next IOHA conference in 2014. Further news can be obtained from their own website later this year.



Last Words

by Matthew Stephen (NTAS)

This recording documents Mr Sheldon-Collin's 'commentary' on an eight millimetre film he donated to the Northern Territory Archives Service, filmed on Darwin's Myilly Point, February 1942. He was billeted on Myilly Point which overlooks Darwin's scenic Fannie Bay. Prior to the war it was a residential area for senior public servants. In 1938 it also became the site of Darwin's hospital. The interview provides a fascinating glimpse into the life of a serviceman stationed in Darwin during World War Two and how it veered from the fear and excitement of bombing raids to the mundane day to day routine of service life.

My full name is Francis Charles Sheldon-Collins. I was born on the third day of July, 1920, in Melbourne. ... I joined the Navy on April eleventh, 1938. ... I loved the Navy. I thought it was terrific, in fact it was the happiest day of my life when I got down to Flinders Naval Depot. After my initial training I graduated from the cookery school. (Side B, Tape 1, p.13)... On Christmas Day, 1941, I took passage to Adelaide and flew to Darwin on the C.J. Levin, a twelve-seater Lockheed Electra Guinea Airways aircraft. (Side B, Tape 1, p.13)

On arrival in Darwin nobody wanted to have anything to do with me. ... After visiting Captain Tozer at the Hotel Darwin ... he decided I would be his cook. ... I formed a very strong opinion that Darwin was being used by the Navy as a dumping ground for misfits, and society people who became 'ninety-day wonders,' as we called them then, and had a King's Commission. ... out of approximately twenty-nine officers in the wardroom mess at Headquarters, there was roughly eighteen or twenty of these pay-master sub-lieutenants. What they did, goodness only knows. (Side B, Tape 1, p.13)

[On the morning of the 19th of February 1942] I was on my bicycle, riding from down Mitchell Street towards to Post Office, when I was intercepted by the Master-at-Arms in the middle of Mitchell Street, outside the civil administration mess, and was told to take cover. On the way I looked up and saw a large number of aircraft, flying

what appeared to me to be directly above Mitchell Street, towards the town area.

I hadn't got into the Naval Depot proper off Mitchell Street when the first bomb landed on the Post Office with a terrific crump, and then pandemonium reigned loose. I took shelter in the Naval Depot, between two of the tin huts in a sand-bag enclosure above the ground and as the Jap pilots in the Zeros hedge-hopped over the Naval Barracks, you could see the Japanese pilot quite distinctly, with his white scarf on and his fur lined helmet, waving and laughing at us. (Side B, Tape 1, p.16)

... I built a fish-net down on Mindil Beach, and that kept the Commander, the steward and myself very well catered for, ... With our fresh milk from the goats, our fish and the venison from the kid goats, you might say we lived high on the hog. (Side B, Tape 1, p.15) ... So in all, speaking from the Officer Corps of the Navy, I don't think for one minute that they can cry hunger or poor food. ... I can't ever remember the wardroom mess or the naval hierarchy being short of booze. (Side B, Tape 1, p.16)

Socially, life was a humdrum, until they instituted weekends for various people at Adelaide River. ... I believe the trips to Berry Springs or Adelaide River, the hunting parties, came to an end when one stupid cook, by the name of Billson, shot a prize bull — [he] thought it was a buffalo. So, like anything, all good things must come to an end. (Side B, Tape 1, p.17)

[On reflecting on my time in Darwin] I don't know why I was sent to Darwin in the first place. ... I hated every minute of it, (Side A, Tape 2, p.3) ... the happiest day of my life was when I got taken to Batchelor field to get on the aircraft to leave, vowing and declaring that I'd never return again, that it'd be part of my life that I would erase from my memory for ever. However, that was not to be. I returned twice again during the war, and several times in the government service thereafter. (Side A, Tape 2, p.4)

Northern Territory Archives Service NTRS 226: Typed transcript of oral history interview with 'TS' prefix, 1979-ct TS 706, FRANCIS SHELDON-COLLINS.

Oral History Association of Australia

South Australian / Northern Territory Branch

The Oral History Association is a non-profit body whose members practice and promote oral history. The aims of the Oral History Association of Australia [OHAA] are:

- to promote the practice and methods of oral history
- to educate in the use of oral history methods
- to encourage discussions on all aspects of oral history
- to foster the preservation of oral history records

The South Australian branch of the OHAA came to life just seven months after the national body was founded in Perth in July 1978.

Services provided by the volunteer committee of the Oral History Association of Australia to members of the SA/NT Branch include:

- *Word of Mouth* Branch newsletter which is published twice a year and includes articles about work being done in South Australia
- Annual Journal of the Oral History Association of Australia which contains papers given at the biennial conference or other papers considered of particular topical interest
- Hire of Fostex digital recording equipment at a membership discount
- Various publications including the Oral History Handbook by Beth Robertson which have a membership discount
- Biennial conference of the OHAA which has a membership discount
- Regular oral history training workshops. These full day workshops introduce participants to the practice and methods of oral history and provide equipment training on the Fostex digital recorders
- Advanced oral history workshops covering a range of issues including ethics, memory and technological advances in the use of oral histories
- Access to the annual OHAA SA/NT Branch grant scheme of \$500 to help foster small oral history initiatives in South Australia and a free workshop
- Access to the branch website: www.ohaa-sa.com.au
- Participation in events which often coincide with the AGM and Christmas eg tours of the Migration Museum and the State Library of South Australia focusing on the audio visual aspects of these organisations; a New Year get together over afternoon tea; talk by Peter Kolomitsev at the State Library on digital technology and equipment; seminars during the Family History Fair and History Week; and exhibitions during History Week